

## Chapter 6

### Immigration from Eastern Turkestan to Turkey in 1961

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#### Abstract

With the invasion of Eastern Turkestan by the People's Liberation Army, persecution and torture began. Due to financial hardship and indifference of the international public, many Eastern Turkestan Muslim-Turks were forced to leave their homeland to seek independence and attract the world's attention to the situation in Eastern Turkestan. These Eastern Turkestanis, who left Eastern Turkestan in 1961 and initially settled in Afghanistan, struggled to survive for months in the region. Mehmet Kasım Cantürk and İsa Yusuf Alptekin in Turkey helped some Eastern Turkestan families emigrate to Turkey and settle in Kayseri. This study describes the struggle of Mehmet Kasım Cantürk and the Eastern Turkestanis who migrated.

#### 1. Life of Eastern Turkestanis under Communist Chinese Rule

When Eastern Turkestan was occupied by Communist China, the Chinese government pursued a policy based on oppression and violence in the region. Under these pressures, the people of Eastern Turkestan appealed to world public opinion by organizing protests to obtain their freedom. However, they did not achieve independence. For this reason, many Eastern Turkestan Muslims decided to leave their homeland and migrate elsewhere.

In this paper, we focus on the migration of Eastern Turkestan people who were forced to leave Eastern Turkestan due to the events that took place in 1961 and who subsequently migrated from Afghanistan to Turkey, settling in Kayseri. The difficulties in Eastern Turkestan were caused by the civil war in China that began in



1925. After World War II, the Communist Chinese won the war between the Nationalist Chinese government and the Chinese People's Liberation Army. The People's Republic of China was established in 1949.<sup>1</sup> The leader of the new administration was Mao Zedong, a communist and chauvinist Chinese nationalist. Mao's greatest dream was to reach the borders of the ancient Chinese Empire in Turkestan. The first thing he did to realize this dream was deployment of infantry units under the command of Wang Zhen to the Gansu on October 12, 1949.<sup>2</sup> The main aim of sending the troops was to break the national sentiments in the region and break the Soviet Russian influence trying to dominate the region.<sup>3</sup> As Chinese forces advanced to the region, Nationalist Chinese soldiers either fled to Taiwan or chose to surrender.<sup>4</sup> The indigenous people wanted to fight, but their efforts were not successful. On October 20, 1949, the Communist Chinese army invaded Urumqi and took over Eastern Turkestan.<sup>5</sup>

In Communist China's occupation of Eastern Turkestan, some leaders such as İsa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Buğra chose to leave the country,<sup>6</sup> while other leaders such as Canımhan Hacı and Osman Batur chose the path of resistance and lost their lives.<sup>7</sup>

In the country, pro-Soviet statesmen, considering cooperation with Communist China, decided to go to Beijing to participate in the "China People's Politics

<sup>1</sup> Han Suyin, *Sabah Tufanı 1: Mao Zedung ve Çin Devrimi 1893-1954*, çev., Coşkun Irmak (İstanbul: Berfin Yayıncılık, 1997), 533.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew D. W. Forbes, *Doğu Türkistan'daki Harp Beyleri: Doğu Türkistan'ın 1911-1949 Arası Siyasi Tarihi*, çev., Enver Can (Münih: Doğu Türkistan Vakfı Yayınları, 1990), 407.

<sup>3</sup> Ebubekir Türksoy, "Hicreti Hazırlayan Sebepler," *Gökbayrak*, sy. 1 (1994): 14.

<sup>4</sup> Allen S. Whiting, "Soviet Strategy in Sinkiang 1933-49," in *Sinkiang: Pawn or Pivot*, ed. Allen S. Whiting and Sheng Shih-ts'ai (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1958), 117-18; Donald Hugh McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang, 1949-1977* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), 24; Li Sheng, *Çin'in Xinjiang Bölgesi: Geçmişi ve Şimdiki Durumu*, çev., Xu Xinyue (Urumqi: Xinjiang Halk Yayınevi, 2006), 117 vd.; Baymirza Hayit, *Türkistan Devletlerinin Millî Mücadeleleri Tarihi*, 2. bs. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2004), 330; Forbes, *Doğu Türkistan'daki*, 406.

<sup>5</sup> McMillen, *Chinese Communist*, 24; June Teufel Dreyer, "The Kazakhs in China," in *Ethnic Conflict in International Relations*, ed. Astri Suhrke and Lela Garner Noble (New York: Praeger, 1977), 155; *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, s.v. "Burhan," New York: Columbia University Press, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Mehmet Emin Buğra, *Doğu Türkistan: Tarihi, Coğrafi ve Şimdiki Durumu* (İstanbul: Güven Basımevi, 1952), 68; Ömer Kul, haz., *Esir Doğu Türkistan İçin: İsa Yusuf Alptekin'in Mücadele Hatıraları* (Ankara: Berikan Yayınevi, 2010), 1: 558; Erkin Alptekin, *Doğu Türkistan'dan Hicretimizin 40. Yılı* (Kayseri: Erciyes Dergisi Doğu Türkistan Yayınları, 1992), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Gülçin Çandarlıoğlu, *Özgürlük Yolu: Nurgocay Baturun Anılarıyla Osman Batur* (İstanbul: Doğu Kütüphanesi, 2006), 204; Hızır Bek Gayretullah, *Altaylarda Kanlı Günler* (İstanbul:

Consultative Conference.” However, on August 27, 1949, they died in a plane crash in near Lake Baikal.<sup>8</sup>

The Communist Chinese administration, which was trying to dominate Eastern Turkestan, tried to remove the leaders that could create problems. Then the Chinese government implemented a policy of Chinese immigrant placement on Turkestan lands.<sup>9</sup> After Chinese immigrants settled in Eastern Turkestan, the indigenous people faced economic trouble. This development was followed by land reforms in 1952 to 1953. In the direction of land reform, the efficient parts of the land were given to the Chinese immigrants and the inefficient lands were given to the local people. This made the indigenous people even poorer, and under the tax burden the public became more oppressed. In 1955, it was decided to consolidate the cooperatives under the name Kaperansiya (Eastern Turkestan dialect form of the Russian word *Kooperatsiya*) in order to obtain better yields from the land that had been distributed. In 1958, the “Commune (Great Leap Forward)” movement was initiated. On communes, the villagers were forced to work for 18 hours a day in unhealthy conditions. They were deprived of social and legal rights. Living on the communes was extremely difficult. For example, family life was ignored and there were no health facilities. In short, a silent genocide took place on the communes, supposedly for the sake of the people.<sup>10</sup>

When the Chinese occupation began, restrictions on travel within the coun-

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Ahmet Sait Matbaası, 1977), 101, 152–53, 157, 160; Hızırбек Gayretullah, “Osman Batur ve Millî Mücadelesi,” *Altay Kartalı Osman Batur*, haz., Hızırбек Gayretullah, Ahmet Türköz ve M. Ali Engin (İstanbul: Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Derneği Yayını, 2003), 16–17, 19, 32–33, 37; İklil Kurban, *Şarki Türkistan Cumhuriyeti: 1944–1949* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1992), 82; Mustafa Başaran, “Doğu Türkistan İstiklâl Kahramanı Osman Batur İslamoğlu (1899–1951)” (bitirme tezi, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1972), 24.

<sup>8</sup> Türksoy, “Hicreti”: 14; Whiting, “Soviet Strategy,” 143; Dreyer, “The Kazakhs in China,” 155; Baymirza Hayit, *Türkistan: Rusya İle Çin Arasında* (İstanbul: Otağ Yayınları, 1975), 322; Basil Davidson, *Turkestan Alive: New Travels in Chinese Central Asia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1957), 132–33; McMillen, *Chinese Communist*, 24; O. Edmund Clubb, *China and Russia: The “Great Game”* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 371; Jack Chen, *The Sinkiang Story* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 275; Kurban, *Şarki Türkistan*, 87; Abdullah Bakır, *Doğu Türkistan İstiklâl Hareketi ve Mehmet Emin Buğra* (İstanbul: Özenk Matbaası, 2005), 90; Amaç Karahoca, *Doğu Türkistan Çin Müstemlekesi* (İstanbul: Fakülte Matbaası, 1960), 25.

<sup>9</sup> Fook-lam Gilbert Chan, “The Road to Power: Sheng Shih-ts’ai’s Early Years in Sinkiang (1930–34),” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 7 (1969): 234; Owen Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia: Xinjiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1950), 68; Aitchen K. Wu, *Turkistan Tumult* (London: Methuen, 1940), 63.

<sup>10</sup> Türksoy, “Hicreti”: 15.

try were introduced. Basic food items were provided by means of ration books. Communication facilities were also restricted to prevent people from organizing. There was even a ban on two people greeting each other on the street. In addition, the use of Turkish and Eastern Turkestan words was prohibited.<sup>11</sup> In 1955, the People's Republic of China wholly bound Eastern Turkestan to itself as the Uyghur Autonomous Region.<sup>12</sup> China treated Eastern Turkestanis as minorities in their homeland to assimilate the Muslim-Turkish people. To this end, a campaign was carried out to disseminate the message that the Turkish people were actually Chinese. The name Eastern Turkestan was changed to Xinjiang (new soil).<sup>13</sup> Particularly, an attempt was made to place Chinese words in public, including as place names.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Türksoy, "Hicreti": 15–16. For the policies Communist China pursued after the invasion of Eastern Turkestan, see Hacı Yakup Anat, *Hayatım ve Mücadelem*, haz., Soner Yalçın (Ankara: Özkan Matbaacılık, 2003), 172–73.

<sup>12</sup> Türksoy, "Hicreti": 16; Ahmet Kemal İlkul, *Çin-Türkistan Hâtıraları: Şanghay Hâtıraları*, haz., Yusuf Gedikli (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyatı, 1997), 42; David Bonavia, "Axe Falls on a Survivalist," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 99, no. 6 (1978): 24; Li, *Çin'in Xinjiang Bölgesi*, 6; Erkin Alptekin, "Eastern Turkestan: An Overview," *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 6, no. 1 (1985): 129; Ahmet Taşağıl, "Esaretteki Son Türk Yurdu," *Tarih ve Medeniyet*, sy. 37 (1997): 24; İsmail Cengiz, *1982 Çin Anayasası'na Göre Doğu Türkistan'ın Hukukî Durumu* (İstanbul: Doğu Türkistan Dayanışma Derneği Yayınları, 1998), 1: 3 dip. 19; Duygu Gözlek, "Asya'nın Kalbi Doğu Türkistan-1," *Gökbayrak*, sy. 71 (2006): 21; Cengiz, *1982 Çin Anayasası'na*, 1: 13.

<sup>13</sup> Türksoy, "Hicreti": 16; Buğra, *Doğu Türkistan*, 27; Michael Dillon, *Doğu Türkistan: Çin Orta Asya'sında Etnik Ayrımcılık ve Kontrol*, çev., Hayati Aktaş (İstanbul: Türk Dünyası Platformu Yayınları, 2001), 4; Morris Rossabi, *Encyclopedia of Asian History*, s.v. "Xinjiang," New York: C. Scribner; London: C. Macmillan, 1988; Alptekin, *Doğu Türkistan'dan*, 5; Erkin Alptekin, "Doğu Türkistan'a Şingcang İsmi Verilişinin 95. Yıldönümü," *Bayrak*, 14 Kasım 1979; Li, *Çin'in Xinjiang Bölgesi*, 117; Melike Ülker ve Nazmiye Yüce, "Doğu Türkistan'ın Sessiz Çılgılığı," *Gökbayrak*, sy. 77 (2007), 21; İsmail Cengiz, *Sürgündeki Doğu Türkistan Hükümeti* (İstanbul: Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Derneği, 2005), 12; Taşağıl, "Esaretteki," 24; Cengiz, *1982 Çin Anayasası'na*, 12; İdil Nilay Demir, "Xin-jiang'da Çin Politikası" (lisans tezi, Ankara Üniversitesi Sinoloji Anabilim Dalı, 1988), 1. Oraltay considers it was 1768 when Eastern Turkestan was named "Xinjiang." Hasan Oraltay, *Hürriyet Uğrunda Doğu Türkistan Kazak Türkleri*, 2. bs. (İstanbul: Türk Kültür Yayıncılık, 1975), 22. Çandarlıoğlu shows that the name "Xinjiang (Hsinchiang)," which means "New Territory," was given to Eastern Turkestan by the subordinates of Sheng Shicai, who was of Chinese origin and studied in Japan, and that a new regime was established through an agreement with Russia. Çandarlıoğlu, *Özgürlük Yolu*, 15. Arpacık mentions "Xin-jiang, which means the new territory forcibly seized" after the occupation of 1878, without revealing the source. Yusuf Ziya Arpacık, *Osman Batur ve Asrın İbretlik Olaylar* (İstanbul: İleriş Yayınları, 2008), 106. Anat lists 1887 as the year that Eastern Turkestan was changed to Xinjiang. Hacı Yakup Anat, "Safsatalara Cevap," *Doğu Türkistan*, sy. 183–84 (1999): 21, dip. 1. Tanrıdağı states Xinjiang means "New Frontier." Erkal Tanrıdağı, "Çin Komünist Partisi'nce Yazdırılıp, Neşrettirilen "Uygurların

Many uprisings broke out in Eastern Turkestan, but China suppressed them and did not allow the establishment of an independent Eastern Turkestan. For instance, in 1956 and 1958, a movement of the rebel Eastern Turkestanis was violently suppressed.<sup>15</sup> For Eastern Turkestanis looking for a way out, the only solution was to leave their homeland.

## 2. Preparations for Migration after the Agreement between China and Afghanistan

When Eastern Turkestan was occupied by Communist China, the Chinese government pursued a policy based on oppression and violence in this region. According to an agreement signed in 1959, people living in Eastern Turkestan who were of Afghan origin could emigrate to Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup> This agreement marked the starting point of the movement that would result in migration to Turkey in 1964. Until now, there have been no academic resources published on this migration. For this reason, Mehmet Cantürk, who helped initiate the beginning of the migration, and Hamit Göktürk and Mahmut Rahmanoğlu, who participated in the migration, tried to describe how the migration was realized.<sup>17</sup>

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Kısaca Tarihi"nin Hiçbir İlmî Kıymeti Yoktur," *Doğu Türkistan'ın Sesi*, sy. 38 (1993): 8. Sadri argues that the name Eastern Turkestan was changed to Xinjiang in 1882. Roostam Sadri, "The Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan: A Commemorative Review," *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 5, no. 2 (1984): 295.

<sup>14</sup> Türksoy, "Hicreti": 16; Buğra, *Doğu Türkistan*, 27; Taşağıl, "Esaretteki," 24; Çandarlıoğlu, *Özgürlük Yolu*, 15; Ömer Kul, "Osman Batur ve Doğu Türkistan Millî Mücadelesi (1911-1955)" (doktora tezi, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2009), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Türksoy, "Hicreti": 16; Anat, *Hayatım ve Mücadelem*, 176.

<sup>16</sup> Türksoy, "Hicreti": 16; İbrahim Yarkın, "Doğu Türkistan Göçmenleri İle İlgili Bazı Bilgiler," *Türk Kültürü*, sy. 38 (1965): 64; Mine Akman, "Uyghur Immigrants in Turkey: A Home Away from Home" (yüksek lisans tezi, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi, 2010), 52; Remzi Ataman, "Türkiye'de Yaşayan Doğu Türkistan Kökenli Uygur Türklerinin Sosyo-Kültürel Kimlikleri -Kayseri Örneği-" (yüksek lisans tezi, Gazi Üniversitesi, 2006), 67. The text of the agreement was not found despite our investigations. Mehmet Cantürk stated that he learned about the existence of the agreement through the official newspaper of China.

<sup>17</sup> Hereafter, the story of the migration led by Cantürk is based on following literatures. Ebubekir Türksoy, "Hazırlık," *Gökbayrak*, sy. 2 (1994): 19-21; "Hicret'e Hazırlık," *Gökbayrak*, sy. 3 (1994): 19-20; "Hicret [4]," *Gökbayrak*, sy. 4 (1994): 18-19; Mehmet Cantürk, "Hicret [5]," *Gökbayrak*, sy. 5 (1994): 18-19; "Hicret [6]," *Gökbayrak*, sy. 6 (1994): 16; "Hicret [7]," *Gökbayrak*, sy. 7 (1995): 18-19; "Hicret [8]," *Gökbayrak*, sy. 8 (1994): 18-19; "Hicret [9]," *Gökbayrak*, sy. 9 (1995): 18-19.

The agreement signed with Afghanistan arose in an interesting way. An old classmate approached Mehmet Cantürk, the leader of emigration, gave him a newspaper, and left without any explanation. The newspaper was the official gazette of the Communist Chinese Government and was only given to Chinese senior officials. When Cantürk read the newspaper, he saw that a comprehensive agreement had been signed in August 1959 between the Chinese dictator Mao and Afghanistan's Prime Minister Mohammed Daoud Khan.<sup>18</sup> The two countries were intent on establishing close relations with each other in economic, commercial, cultural, and political areas. The newspaper also stated that people of Afghan origin living in Eastern Turkestan could come to Afghanistan. After reading about the agreement, Cantürk decided to leave for Afghanistan to describe the pressures experienced by Eastern Turkestan people to the free world. However, the real problem was that very few people living in Eastern Turkestan were of Afghan origin. For this reason, some people thought about using friendships and kinships that had been established through trade with Afghanistan over the course of years. These people gave references to their relatives living in Afghanistan. Some people bribed Chinese officers and managed to use the agreement in accordance with their own interests.<sup>19</sup>

Cantürk first consulted with a friend who had information about the road. At the same time, he wrote a letter to the Embassy of Afghanistan in Beijing. The answer to the letter arrived a month later. The Afghan ambassador confirmed the agreement and said that anyone who wanted to emigrate to Afghanistan should apply to the embassy.<sup>20</sup> After that, he secretly forwarded relevant information to his immediate surroundings. After a while, the secret information became known and there was no longer a need to work in secret. The work accelerated, and preparations for migration began.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> We could not meet Mehmet Cantürk because of his health problems, and he passed away on February 1, 2015. However, his son Ahmet Cantürk said he could not remember where his father put the newspaper.

<sup>19</sup> We interviewed Hamit Göktürk and Mahmut Rahmanoğlu (Istanbul, February 15, 2014) and asked them how they benefited from this agreement despite their being of Uyghur origin. Many families said they went to Afghanistan because of trade and their families were related to Afghans through marriage. They indicated that they benefited in this way. They also said many people bribed Chinese officers and acted as if they had relatives in Afghanistan.

<sup>20</sup> Türksoy, "Hazırlık": 21.

<sup>21</sup> In an interview, Mahmut Rahmanoğlu said, "Thanks to trade, some Afghanistanis had settled in Eastern Turkestan. The agreement between China and Afghanistan gave Afghans

### 3. Coming to the Sino-Afghan Border under Chinese Supervision

After 20 months of work, petition forms were sent out by the Afghan Embassy. Approximately one month after the forms were filled out, notices were sent to the petitioners by the neighborhood outposts. According to the notices, persons participating in the migration would be divided into three groups and the first group would gather in Yarkand Toluk Secondary School within 15 days. On May 17, 1961, the first gathering was held in the courtyard of Toluk Middle School, surrounded by high walls. The Chinese confiscated the immigrants' precious goods, such as gold and silver. Those who had money were told to deposit it to the bank. They could receive their money back in Afghanistan. The immigrants had nothing besides a pillow, duvet, and a few goods.<sup>22</sup> They also had dried bread that they shared for the migration. On that day, although they had gathered to immigrate, they were kept waiting in the school for various reasons. In the meantime, they were forbidden from contacting outsiders. They were under constant police surveillance. An inspector called "Kalta Xitay (short Chinese)" by Eastern Turkestan was sent from Beijing for this journey. The people who were kept waiting for days in the schoolyard were fed only turnip and dry bread, which they boiled in water. In addition, during the week they spent in the school garden, communist propaganda was distributed to them. Yet rather than live under oppression, the people chose to leave their homeland, families, and friends. In addition, the names of their relatives who were staying in Eastern Turkestan were taken. This created anxiety within the group. Some gave up relocating because of fear that the Chinese government would harm their relatives.

In the 1961 migration, about 118 families moved from Eastern Turkestan to Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup> This migration, however, differed from the previous migrations in that it was made with official permission. Not all of the families migrated at once; instead, they came in groups. The first group was put on trucks to be taken to the Afghanistan border on May 24, 1961. The group, going through Manas, Hutubi, Urumqi, Aksu, Kucha, Yengisar, and Kashgar, crossed the boundary and came to the Pamir

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who settled in Eastern Turkestan an opportunity to return. Citizens of Afghanistan in Eastern Turkestan were applying to the government authorities to go back. Family elders who heard of this course applied to be able to go to Afghanistan from Eastern Turkestan. In June 1961, some Uyghur Turks also decided to go to Afghanistan under the leadership of Mehmet Cantürk to escape from Chinese oppression, taking advantage of the situation."

<sup>22</sup> According to Hamit Göktürk, though many migrants were very poor, some families engaged in trade. There were many valuable goods and gold.

<sup>23</sup> "Doğu Türkistan'dan Kanlı Göçler," *Türk Dünyası*, sy. 7 (1967): 11.

Mountains region from the Tashkurgan region. The first group, which consisted of 34 families and 128 people, was packed into four trucks along with their belongings under the leadership of Mehmet Cantürk. They were prepared to go out with a police inspector Kalta Xitay from Beijing and 10 policemen.<sup>24</sup>

The day the trucks delivered people from Yarkand to Kashgar, the population at the first head was about 135–140 people. They were placed in the former British Consulate-General in Chini Bagh and waited for a week.<sup>25</sup> Then, they were put in trucks again. The group traveled to Tashkurgan city and came Tash Malik in the vicinity of Upal<sup>26</sup> that night. The next day, they reached mountainous and hilly areas. After passing by the edge of Tashkurgan city, the group got off the trucks. The trucks went back, and the immigrants spent the night there.

In the morning, people who were indigenous to the region and lived in the mountains were brought to guide them. Based on the groups' size and number of children, the guides advised that everyone should buy a donkey.<sup>27</sup> However, due to insufficient finances, the families could only afford a few donkeys. After staying there for three days, they went to Pamir Mountains and then to the Sino-Afghan border. After passing through places named Subashi and Chechektu, they reached the top, called Tikili. Officers pointed downward from the top and told the migrants that Afghanistan was there. They said to travel in that direction.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. From Afghanistan to Pamir

The emigrant group moved toward the direction they had been shown as Afghanistan. They traveled between the Himalaya Mountains and a rocky hill. Chinese officers and police behind them watched the group from the hill. As the group

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<sup>24</sup> Hamit Göktürk explained that neighbors and relatives saw them off in tears, even though the Chinese government does not allow it and that they cried in these embraces not to forget each other.

<sup>25</sup> It is highly possible that the Chinese Gazette given to Mehmet Cantürk was taken in Kashgar.

<sup>26</sup> The place Mahmud Kashgari is buried.

<sup>27</sup> Mahmut Rahmanoğlu explained that the refugees had to sell their clothes and even their gold teeth and shirt buttons due to material shortages.

<sup>28</sup> According to Hamit Göktürk, the Chinese officers showed them forward with their own hands as if they were saying, "Go, let us get rid of you" at the border and watched the migrant group go from the hilltop after saying Afghanistan was there.



climbed, it started to snow even though it was June.<sup>29</sup> People tried to protect themselves from the cold by putting clothes on their hands. After walking up the hill for about a kilometer, they saw structures that looked like houses. These buildings were not houses, but domes.<sup>30</sup> It turned out there was nobody there. All together, they looked for a solution. One of them said that he knew the place because he had come to the plateau with his father when he was young. Four or five members of the group went in search of people who might live nearby.

They walked 4–5 km on difficult roads and saw smoke rising from a place. When they went there, they saw 7–8 tents. As they approached the tents, one of them was stopped by an elder and two youths who were. They were Kyrgyz. “Who are you?” a man said, “I will fire if you approach.” The migrants responded that they had come from Kashgar, that they were not alone, that 130 people were staying in the place where the domes were, and that their lives were in danger. When the Kyrgyz people asked, “Are you Muslims?” they replied yes. The Kyrgyzs then asked them to read various Qur’anic sura to test whether they were Muslims.

The Kyrgyzs invited them into their tents and offered them milk, dried curd, cream, and milk tea.<sup>31</sup> The emigrants asked for help. Kyrgyz shepherds told the wife of the *aga* about the situation. Then, 12 Tibetan oxen, 10 horses, a pair of mullets, two pairs of overalls, cream, milk, and dried curd, were given to the emigrants. These materials were from the *aga*’s wife. The guests were taken to the Kyrgyz tents. The guests were served meat, cream and milk as an evening meal and spent the night in the tents.

In the morning, officials came from the Afghanistan Population Division. Mehmet Cantürk, who understood the seriousness of the officials, showed them the letter from the Embassy of Afghanistan. The officials read the letter and spoke about

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<sup>29</sup> Hamit Göktürk, who told an interesting story about the snowfall, narrated that he felt warm when he slept although the weather was cold when he reached the bottom of the felt in the evening because it had snowed a snap-depth on the felt and this snow acted as a quilt.

<sup>30</sup> Mahmut Rahmanoğlu stated that they encountered many such *kümbets* (domes) along the road, that it caught his attention that the distance from one *kümbet* to another was a day-long interval on foot, and that many people still had to sleep outside since they did not fit into the *kümbets* encountered along the road due to the group’s large size.

<sup>31</sup> Mahmut Rahmanoğlu and Hamit Göktürk stated that Kyrgyz leader Rahmankul Khan helped arriving families in the point of fodder. Göktürk stated that they gave Kyrgyzs goods such as cloth for the horses taken from the Kyrgyzs.

it in Persian. Cantürk, the only person who knew Persian among them, gave the officials necessary information. The officials' attitudes changed after the answers they received.

Afghan officials told the Kyrgyzs to help them in every way and to send them to the official government authorities. Rahmankul Khan,<sup>32</sup> the leader of the Kyrgyz Turks there, brought the emigrants up to Shighnan. He then handed them over to the commander of the border guard in Shighnan.<sup>33</sup>

## 5. Difficulties in Afghanistan and Attempts to Emigrate to Turkey as Settled Immigrants

The group that stayed in Shighnan for one week moved from there to Badakhshan. The emigrants were provided with a variety of food along the way by locals.<sup>34</sup> Emigrants who reached Badakhshan in the middle of August were placed in a large yard. There, the government authorities took records of who they were. At the beginning of September 1961, it was reported that a group of 20 families and their leader Abdülveli Efendigil were moving toward Afghanistan. Many houses were rented with the support of traders who formerly knew the emigrants, and the first group was placed in these houses. The second group that came later was placed in the yard. Mehmet Cantürk played an active role in the investigation of emigration affairs and the second group of emigrants. Meanwhile, the third group of about 20 families, led by Mir Ahmet Batur, was reported to have crossed the border. The third group consisted mainly of children and elderly people. After great troubles, the third

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<sup>32</sup> Rahmankul Khan led the Kyrgyz people living in Ulupamir village of Erciş District of Van until 1990. Hadji Rahmankul Khan's 77-year-old miserable life filled with immigration, deportation, and conflicts ended in the Erzurum State Hospital on August 6, 1990. Rahmankul Khan, who had nine sons and one daughter, greatly affected the Pamir Kyrgyzs. İsmail Cengiz, "Rahmankul Han Ata'nın Öyküsü," İyigünler.net, 27 Kasım 2014, <http://www.iyigunler.net/rahmankul-han-atanin-oykusu-makale,1815.html> (accessed: November 23, 2018)

<sup>33</sup> Hamit Göktürk tells that Rahmankul Khan felt very angry because one of the Kyrgyz people who were assigned to take them did not want to give them their horses, and that he ordered this fellowman to carry the immigrants' belongings on his back. While Göktürk praised Khan's leadership and authority, he was also rather worried about this fellowman.

<sup>34</sup> According to Mahmut Rahmanoğlu, when they came to the Ishkashim district of Fayzabad by the way of Badakhshan, they tried to obtain food by begging on the way due to hunger, and as they continued they ate edible grasses.

group reached the Ishkashim District of Afghanistan. With the help of the governor, they were brought to Badakhshan.

In addition, it was learned that the fourth group of about 24 families had come in under the leadership of Yusuf Batuhan. The fourth group entered Afghanistan through the Pamir Plateau in the end of September 1961. When the group reached Badakhshan, they were placed in places where Cantürk and his followers had been set previously. The people who settled in Afghanistan gradually began to deal with problems of subsistence, but this time the Afghanistan government started to feel political pressures coming from China. In September 1962, the Afghan police took 24 families, who settled in Ghazni, Kandahar, and Khan Abad cities, to Badakhshan and settled them in the garden of pilgrimage place named “Hirka-i-Sharif,” where they were cordoned off by soldiers. It was learned that these Eastern Turkestani would be returned to China on September 20, 1962.<sup>35</sup> Then, the other Eastern Turkestani people made a great effort to solve this problem by meeting with politicians, and they managed to stop the decision.

Mehmet Cantürk and his followers became worried after this event. Following consultations, they decided to settle in Kabul because there were consulates of many countries there. If they encountered a negative situation, they could take shelter in the consulates. The move of these families to Kabul continued until the middle of 1963. Only 10–12 families remained in Badakhshan after these movements.

Meanwhile, everyone was concerned about livelihood. While some people were working in jobs related to their profession, those who were unemployed started to work in various factories.<sup>36</sup> When Cantürk, who had served as an imam in Eastern Turkestan, came to Afghanistan, he learned watchmaking and later opened a shop.

Cantürk wanted to do something for Eastern Turkestan. He went to the UNESCO library of the United Nations in Kabul and started to research Arabic and Persian works. He wrote an article about the reasons for their migration from Eastern

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<sup>35</sup> Hamit Göktürk told us that Afghans were prejudiced against them because they came from a communist country, but they gave some aid. According to Göktürk, the Afghan Government wanted to send his own family back to Eastern Turkestan. However, when those were against being sent back cried, the commander of the border felt sorry for them and swore he would not send them.

<sup>36</sup> According to Göktürk, although the Afghan Government did not give them citizenship and it was forbidden, the government tolerated their activities and the people of Afghanistan helped them. However, the government did not help to feed them at all because Afghanistan was a poor state.

Turkestan in the newspaper *Enes*, published in Kabul.<sup>37</sup> He decided to describe the Chinese persecution in Eastern Turkestan to the media in Kabul and to draw international attention to the issue. For this, he wrote Persian articles in the newspaper *Enes* in the capital city Kabul and sought an opportunity to speak on Radio Kabul. Both organizations said he needed permission from the Ministry of Transport and Press. Thus, Mehmet Cantürk was sent to the Ministry of Interior Affairs. The Minister of the Interior invited Cantürk to his office. "Afghanistan is a small state," the Minister said, "we cannot deal with Russia and China. You can carry out these issues, however, in Turkey." Meanwhile, the Chinese Embassy officially requested the return of refugees from the Afghan government.

One day, Cantürk's parents told him that a police officer had come from the Kabul police headquarters to see him during his absence. He went to the Kabul police and did not open his shop the next day. In the section of foreigner affairs, Cantürk interviewed an inspector named Bekir who had left him a message. Inspector Bekir invited Cantürk to his room and extended a letter to him. Cantürk read it two or three times. The inspector turned to Cantürk and said, "Did you understand? That's all from me. You're on your own!" He then took back the paper. The paper said that all the Eastern Turkestani people who had come to Afghanistan from the Pamir Mountains in 1961 would be officially handed over to the Chinese border guard on September 22, 1964. This letter, which was the decision of the Afghan Parliament, held the official seal and signature of the Prime Minister of the Interior and Foreign Ministers. Cantürk immediately went to the house of Habibullah Adam, a Pakistani professor, after saying goodbye to Inspector Bekir. Habibullah Adam prepared an English petition and gave it to Cantürk. He advised him to take the petition to the UNESCO branch in Kabul and give it to the president if possible. Cantürk went to the place where he waited for hours to be able to submit the petition to the president. Finally, he succeeded in giving it to the president. The president of UNESCO said something to the interpreter after taking the petition. The interpreter told Cantürk and his followers, "We are a small institution, and this is an internal issue of Afghanistan. We cannot intervene in the internal affairs of the state." He returned the petition to them. When Cantürk and his followers left the UNESCO building, they saw a signboard that said "Turkish Embassy" on opposite side. Soon they

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<sup>37</sup> We could not confirm this newspaper Cantürk mentioned. It was a local publication, and there were no numbers.

crossed to the opposite sidewalk and read again and again the signboard that said “Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Kabul” in Turkish. They entered and met a guard and an Afghan police officer at the gate of the embassy. The guard blocked Cantürk and his followers, shouting “Get back! What do you want?” Cantürk explained that they were Uyghur Turks from Eastern Turkestan. Guard said to Cantürk, “Wait in the garden.” The guard came back and said that the general secretary of the embassy was waiting for them. Upon hearing this, Cantürk and his followers walked toward the detached building. General Secretary of the Embassy of the Kabul, Kaya Toperi, welcomed them.

Kaya Toperi asked what they wanted. In reply, Mehmet Cantürk explained that all migrants passing through the borders of Afghanistan from June to the end of September 1961 were in danger of being sent back to China. “We have been aware of you since the day and hour you came to Afghanistan,” Toperi said, “We are well aware of what happened to you in Badakhshan. We are also aware of how many families and populations are in Kabul and other provinces and accidents. Nobody has ever come to tell us about it. We, as the embassy, went to the tents in Qataghan, Aybak, Mazar-i-Sharif, and the Turks in the vicinity of Ghazni and the plains. We have been their guests for days. You have just come here.” The Secretary General went to inform the embassy. After 15–20 minutes, he returned to the room and took Cantürk and his followers to the ambassador. When they entered the ambassador’s office, they met with the Ambassador of Kabul, Talat Benler, who was tall, weak, and around 60 years old. Cantürk told the ambassador of their request to go to Turkey since they were faced with the danger of forced repatriation to China. The ambassador asked if everyone who migrated had the same opinion. Cantürk replied yes. The ambassador proposed that Cantürk and his followers should rest in the garden. He himself would go to the Afghan authorities for negotiation.

Mehmet Cantürk and his followers waited in the garden. Approximately an hour and a half later, the ambassador arrived. The ambassador exited his vehicle and told Cantürk and his followers, “Now there is no danger of extradition. The Afghan government will give you citizenship, with which you can live where you want. I have just met the Prime Minister, the Interior and Foreign Ministers.” The Afghan ministers said that the decision to extradite was the decision of the Afghan Parliament, the only thing that they had to obey. They then promised that this decision would be discussed again in the parliament. The ambassador laughed happily, say-

ing, "They promised me that you will be able to live as an Afghan citizen wherever you want." Cantürk said, "They may have given this promise to you today. They can return us in pieces later. Please help us so that we can go to Turkey!" The ambassador replied "I cannot say anything about that. But why not?" He invited Cantürk and his followers to his office. The Ambassador of Kabul received detailed information from them about the locations of people from Eastern Turkestan in Afghanistan. He was asked again whether everyone agreed about going to Turkey. Cantürk and his followers repeated that everyone agreed. Then the ambassador called the first secretary to send a telegram. The latter said they would receive an answer within 15 days. Cantürk and his followers left the embassy building after the telegram was written. When they left, Kaya Toperi told them that they could come to the embassy for any trouble.

Mehmet Cantürk and his followers went back and told the situation to all their fellow countrymen. He said they would receive a reply from Ankara after 15 days. All the emigrants were waiting for what would come. After 15 days, Cantürk met with General Secretary Kaya Toperi and the first secretary Hayati and learned that the answer had not come yet from Ankara. Cantürk went to the embassy building three or four times a week to learn the answer to the telegram. Each time they went to the embassy, they were asked whether they had any trouble. This took about a year. One day, when Cantürk closed his workplace and returned home, he learned that he had been called by the consulate. When Cantürk went to the consulate the next day, Kaya Toperi was at the door. "170 families were accepted," he said. In the consulate, the places where these 170 families resided were identified and their addresses were defined. The responsibility to inform his fellow countrymen outside Kabul was entrusted to Cantürk. The embassy officials also said they would help him with financial issues. Upon this, Cantürk started to work immediately to inform his fellow countrymen living elsewhere, the families who wanted to migrate, came to Kabul and settled there. Cantürk immediately sent the lists of the families who came to Kabul to the embassy authorities.

Meanwhile, the Chinese, Russian, and American embassies in Kabul tried to incite people against Turkey. They said, "There is no religion in Turkey, no prayer. Twenty people die in the hospitals every day. Their cause of death is malnutrition. Women walk naked. Old people cannot walk around with beards and turban." The American embassy said that they would bring 35 people to Canada every year. The

Russians, meanwhile, expressed that they could take three or four families to Russia. The Chinese attempted material, moral, and political repression as possible to prevent the Eastern Turkestanis from going to the free world. As a result of these campaigns, divisions among the Eastern Turkestanis in Afghanistan arose. Most of them wanted to go to sacred lands like Mecca and Medina, and this view gained weight over time. Cantürk told this development to Habibullah Adam, who was helping the group and working to solve their problems in Kabul. Habibullah Adam said that it was a very good idea and that he himself could also go to the Saudi Arabian Consulate in the event. Later, Cantürk and Habibullah Adam went to the Saudi Arabian Consulate and told the authorities their troubles. The authorities said that they could receive four families each year during the pilgrimage season. After leaving the consulate, they had a consultation meeting, and as a result, Cantürk and his followers decided to go to Turkey.

Meanwhile, application forms for Taiwan passports were sent to 170 families from the Taiwan Embassy in Jeddah. In addition, a letter was sent to them saying that they could live in Saudi Arabia. With Habibullah's advice, they wrote Mehmet Emin Buğra and İsa Yusuf Alptekin in Istanbul about to ask the matter. Within 15 days, they received replies. Cantürk told Habibullah about the contents of the letters. "Would you like to live in Saudi Arabia and say, 'I'm Chinese with a Chinese passport?'" the replies said, "or would you prefer to live in Turkey and say, 'I am a Muslim Turk?' We leave this choice to you entirely. The decision is yours." After listening, Mr. Habibullah recommended, "Here, leaders and those with leadership qualities, go to Turkey and never part from their ways." On the same day, emigrants from Eastern Turkestan came together and consulted among themselves. After this consultation, they all decided to go to Turkey.<sup>38</sup> Six families who had wanted to stay in Afghanistan also agreed to go to Turkey following interviews.

Two days later, General Secretary Kaya Toperi told Mehmet Cantürk that some of them were withdrawing from the list Cantürk gave him, that they were deleting their names, and that Cantürk was mocking him. Upon hearing this, Cantürk explained to Toperi that the consulates of other countries had carried out propagand-

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<sup>38</sup> Although the decision to go to Turkey was made by consensus in a consultation meeting, Hamit Göktürk pointed out that a great majority of families declined to go because they were attracted to Chinese propaganda on the subject, that these people became miserable later, that they applied in 1967 to come to Turkey, and that some parts of families came to Turkey this way.

da campaigns. Toperi became angry, saying, "Why did not you tell us about these things? Why did not you inform us?" He continued, "We can even delay your departure to Turkey. Try to send all of the 170 families as possible." About five months later, 71 families had decided to go to Turkey as a result of contacts and talks Cantürk had made.

## **6. Settlement of Eastern Turkestani People Who Came to Turkey from Afghanistan**

Mehmet Cantürk and his followers worked for months. However, only 71 families decided to come to Turkey. The others made it clear that they would not come. Cantürk and his followers later informed the Consulate about the final decision of the 71 families. A group from Kabul Embassy and Eastern Turkestanis went to the UNESCO branch of Kabul to request that the International Committee of the Red Cross supply aircraft from Kabul to Ankara. Organization officials promised to help. Secretary General Kaya Toperi told the Eastern Turkestanis to prepare for the journey to Turkey, and they began their preparations. The Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Kabul announced the dates of when the refugees would go to Ankara: October 8, 10, and 12, 1965. When the last emigrants boarded the plane, some others who preferred to remain in Afghanistan said that they gave up staying there. They started crying, asking that they also be included as emigrants. Kaya Toperi said that it was normal to be fooled by propaganda. He said they would try to help those who were staying. Cantürk was asked to work for the acceptance of these persons. Hence, he introduced two prominent remnants to Toperi, said farewell to them, and boarded the plane. Some time after its departure, the aircraft landed at the Tehran Airport and refueled. Some minutes later, it landed again at the Tehran Airport due to a propeller malfunction. Thanks to the early recognition of this danger, a disaster was avoided.

After staying spending a night in Tehran for a day or two, Cantürk and the third group were transferred to Ankara on October 14 with another plane.<sup>39</sup> After the meal and other necessities were cleared, their names and surnames were confirmed at the Ankara Airport. Incoming families were given new surnames. After this process was over, the group journeyed to Kayseri by bus. When they arrived in Kayseri,

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<sup>39</sup> The first group departed Kabul on October 8, 1965, and the second one departed on October 10. These groups did not have an airplane accident.



they were placed in the Meydan Hotel in Düvenönü. Two groups that had arrived early were placed in hotels named Sivas and Sakarya.

The daily food needs of the group were met by the Kayseri Soil Settlement Bureau along with their subsistence and other needs. On the other hand, the arrival of the Eastern Turkestanis was reported to the public every hour on the Ankara Radio. People came to visit them from the surrounding provinces and counties. Eastern and Western Turkestani peoples, who had come to Turkey and settled in Adana, İzmir, Nevşehir, Istanbul, Ankara, Niğde, Aksaray, and Konya, and other immigrant Turks also visited them. In all three hotels, there were journalists of the Soil Bureau and the Police Service. They were allowed to visit after the police performed identity checks.

October 29 was the Republic Day of Turkey. This was the first time the immigrant Turks participated in the national holiday celebrating the free Turkish State. Everyone, young and old, participated in the parade wearing their national costumes, and older people stood at the front. After the parade, they took souvenir photos in the park on the square. Local and foreign members of the press also took photographs. Photos of that day are available in Mehmet Cantürk's archive.<sup>40</sup> Nuh Mehmet Küçükçalık, the mayor at the time, and nationalists have shown interest in them.

These immigrants, who had to leave their homelands in Eastern Turkestan because of the Chinese occupation, fled to Afghanistan on a 120-day trek on foot. While in Afghanistan, the Eastern Turkestanis applied to emigrate to Turkey through the Eastern Turkestan Immigrants Association in Istanbul. Thereupon, the Association placed 118 families in Turkey. This work was carried out as a result of the efforts of the Association's Chairman İsa Yusuf Alptekin and assistant lawyer İlhan Musabay.<sup>41</sup> With the efforts of both the Government of Turkey and lawmakers such as Dr. Faruk Sükan, Eastern Turkestan refugees were brought to Turkey as emigrants. The necessary appropriation for them was put in the 1964 fiscal year budget. Despite the adoption of 118 families, only 71 emigrant families were brought from Afghanistan to Turkey. The other families stayed in Afghanistan. The 71 families that came to Turkey were brought to Ankara by aircraft belonging to Afghan Airlines, for which

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<sup>40</sup> Fig. 1 (See p. 151).

<sup>41</sup> Fig. 2 (p. 152); Akman, "Uyghur Immigrants," 53.

the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees paid the transportation costs.<sup>42</sup> Eastern Turkestani peoples arrived in Turkey on October 11, 13, and 16.<sup>43</sup> The Eastern Turkestan Immigrants Association worked to bring the remaining 165 people who had stayed in Afghanistan. On May 11, 1965, it submitted an application for this to the Prime Minister's Office of Turkey. Subsequently, on September 26, 1965, the Association applied to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As the result of the work of the Minister of Village Affairs (Sabit Osman Avcı) and the President of the Eastern Turkestan Immigrants Association (İsa Yusuf Alptekin), the emigrants were then brought to Turkey.

The construction of immigrant houses in the Kayseri Province center was initiated with the intention of bringing Eastern Turkestani immigrants home. İsa Yusuf Alptekin frequently visited Ankara to settle immigrants in Turkey.<sup>44</sup> The undertakings have yielded results.

The families were taken to the immigrant house buildings of the Ministry of Village Affairs in the Akköprü area of the Varlık Neighborhood, Ankara, and were hosted for three days. Immigrants toured Ankara for three days and then moved to Kayseri on November 8, 1967, with buses provided by the Kızılay (Turkish Red Crescent).<sup>45</sup> The government placed them in a hotel until houses were built in Kayseri. The immigrants were then placed in these houses.<sup>46</sup>

After 1967, the number of those who came from Eastern Turkestan to Turkey was limited, but people have continued arriving, using their own means.<sup>47</sup> The number of Eastern Turkestanis who have taken refuge in Turkey has been limited to 10 to 15 families; however, it is increasing day by day.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Ömer Kul, haz., *Esir Doğu Türkistan İçin: İsa Yusuf Alptekin'in Mücadele Hatıraları (1949–1980)* (Ankara: Berikan Yayınevi, 2007), 2: 550.

<sup>43</sup> *Milliyet*, 10 Ekim 1965. Without specifying the source, Göde gives these dates as October 8, 10, and 12, and he states that 370 people in 104 families arrived, that they stayed in the hotels from October 12, 1965 to November 16, 1966, and that then they were placed in their houses. Kemal Göde, "Dünden Bugüne Kayseri'ye Gelen Uygur Türkleri," *Türk Dünyası Tarih Dergisi*, sy. 71 (1992): 48.

<sup>44</sup> Kul, *Esir Doğu*, 2: 551–56.

<sup>45</sup> For immigrants' programs in Ankara, see Kul, *Esir Doğu*, 2: 555–56.

<sup>46</sup> Fig. 3.

<sup>47</sup> For an example of two families who escaped from Communist China, see Fig. 4.

<sup>48</sup> For immigrants from Eastern Turkestan to Turkey since 1967, see Akman, "Uygur Immigrants," 53 etc.

## ATTACHMENTS (Please refer to pages 151–155)

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